Report of a consultation on the Social Assistance Act

[title supplied by cataloguer]

Message from the Minister

I am pleased to present the *Report of a Consultation on the Social Assistance Act.* In January 2002, the Department of Human Resources and Employment released *Investing in People: New Directions for Social Assistance Legislation* to help guide the revision of the Social Assistance Act and associated regulations. Since then, the Department's staff have held focus groups with clients, community groups and staff to seek their views.

The views presented during the consultation process reflected a wide range of opinions and deeply held beliefs. People most closely affected by our programs identified their major areas of concern and priorities. The consultation process confirmed the importance of the Income Support and the Employment and Career Service programs to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The information and recommendations brought forward underscores the need to provide Income Support in a dignified and least intrusive manner, while assisting those who need help preparing for, finding, and keeping work.

The primary purpose of the consultation process was to seek input into the drafting of new legislation to guide both the Income Support and Employment and Career Services programs. As expected, many people offered their opinions on whether or not these programs are working the way they should.

This consultation process confirmed for us the need to continue to address issues such as the adequacy of the Income Support program and dignified service delivery. We heard participants state that the Income Support program does not adequately meet the needs of clients. We have made substantial gains in recent years in redesigning the Income Support program, despite the continuing fiscal challenges that exist. The introduction of the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit, the new Mother Baby Nutritional Supplement, extended drug card, changes to earnings exemptions, and other initiatives have had a real impact. Our consultations with clients and community groups throughout the

province certainly confirmed this, as time and time again these initiatives were raised as examples of the direction we need to build on. We have accomplished much, and we intend to continue to introduce changes to our programs that will have positive impacts on the people who use our services. We may not, within the context of changing our legislation, be able to act on all the program review issues and ideas that people contributed. Nevertheless, as resources become available, the Department is committed to continuing to make improvements in our programs, and the results of this consultation will be used for that purpose.

We are taking steps, as well, to address participants' concerns regarding service delivery. The Department's 'new front door' will enable people to be served by mail, by phone, and in person. Our goal is to ensure that staff have more time to focus on people rather than administration, that applications for Income Support are most efficiently processed, and that policies are consistently applied. All offices will have staff trained to work face-to-face with clients in assisting them to prepare for, find, and keep work, to meet their Income Support needs, or to connect them to services delivered by other agencies and departments. Our efforts to improve service delivery are focused on introducing changes to the way we administer our programs so that staff will be able to spend more time with people who need assistance. The result will be improved client choice, enhanced client privacy and confidentiality, appropriate responses to address gaps in services delivered by Human Resources and Employment and improved linkages to other services offered by Health and Community Services Boards and other community agencies.

We continue to strive to improve our services and programs through redesign, and this report is an important part of that process. As the legislation is drafted, participants' opinions will form a foundation to further enhance the changes made to date and to plan for continued policy development that supports the most vulnerable citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I thank all those who have contributed.

RALPH WISEMAN
Minister

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from the Minister i

Introduction 1

New Service Delivery System 3

Consultation Process 4

Profile of People Receiving Income Support 6

Summary of Key Messages 14

What People Said: Specific Responses 21

A. Scope of the Legislation - A New Vision 21

B. Ensuring Stable and Dignified Social Assistance for Those Who Need It 24

C. Removing Barriers to Work 30

D. Helping People Prepare For, Find, and Keep a Job Through Active Training and Employment Measures 31

E. Accountability 40

F. A Fair and Efficient Appeals Process 44

Other Issues and Areas for Improvement 47

Appendices 55

105-07031/

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Human Resources and Employment is revising its Social Assistance Act and Regulations. On January 7, 2002, the Minister of Human Resources and Employment announced a consultation process to seek input from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The consultation captured the views of citizens, their ideas on ways to improve the legislation, and their diverse opinions and solutions to the challenges facing the Department. This report presents a background to the consultation, describes the consultation process, and summarizes what people said.

Government recognizes that to move forward in economic and social prosperity, it is important that all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have a say in the development of legislation to form the basis for supports to meet the needs of the people of our province. This key partnership between Government and citizens is central to government's Strategic Social Plan, which emphasizes the important link between economic and social development within our communities.

In the late 1990s, Government approved a number of changes that altered the way in which social services and labour market programs were delivered. The goal was to remove barriers to employment in the Income Support program and develop proactive measures to assist individuals find and maintain employment. A new department, Human Resources and Employment, was created with two main lines of business: Income Support and labour market programs. In 1997, labour market programs were transferred from the Department of Development and Rural Renewal, and, in 1998, Child, Youth and Family Services and Family and Rehabilitative Services were transferred to Health and Community Services. Thus, in the past few years the mandate of the Department of Human Resources and Employment has shifted to include active programs that help people enter or re-enter the labour market, in addition to the provision of Income Support.

As the Department continues to move forward in redesigning supports and services, it is important that legislation governing its programs reflect this approach. The current Social Assistance Act and its Regulations were introduced

in 1977. While this legislation has served the Department well, it no longer reflects a concentration on active programs to help clients reach their employment and career goals. In addition, time spent on administrative tasks is an issue that many Departments and agencies face. An Income Support program that meets the basic needs of people, is less intrusive into people's personal lives, and is accountable for public funds is enhanced through the use of modern technology to reduce administrative effort. This enables the Department's staff to spend as much time as possible assisting clients to explore employment and career options. As well, the Department has started to focus on ways of supporting low income working families in addition to those who require Income Support.

Feedback from the consultation process will help shape the legislation that will assist the Department to meet its goals, including ensuring dignified financial support for all people who use its services and supporting those who can find and maintain employment. The Department also is working to remove barriers people face in supporting themselves and their families, and focusing on ways to ease the transition from Income Support to work.

New Service Delivery System

Although this consultation process was focused on developing a new legislative framework, feedback was received, as well, on programs and service delivery. Specific concerns were raised regarding the Department's intention to introduce telephone applications and what this would mean for clients, as well as the need for improved linkages with the Department of Health and Community Services.

In recent years, paperwork has consumed more and more staff time. Clients have also begun using telephone and mail services more often than in-person visits. Given these trends, the Department designed a 'new front door' - service delivery premised on three ways to access services. This new service delivery approach will be piloted this coming fall and, if successful, will be implemented throughout the province. Using this new approach, clients will, at their choice, be able to access the Department's services by telephone, through the mail, or in person. They will continue to be able to visit an office in their area, if necessary.

The new front door will improve service in a number of ways. By providing three ways to be served, client choice is enhanced. Clients who choose to use the telephone to access services will enjoy greater privacy in calling from their own homes, instead of having to travel to the nearest office. Greater efficiencies will allow staff more time to spend with clients on issues like helping them prepare for, find, and keep work, rather than on doing paperwork. Gaps in service between the Department and other departments, such as Health and Community Services, will be more readily identified and resolved. Because people working for the Department will be more specialized, policies will be more consistently applied.

Thus, new legislation is only one component of the Department's new direction. This consultation process will be both a source of reference as legislation is drafted over the summer, and a foundation for future policy development. Although some program and service delivery suggestions may require new resources, these consultations will continue to be a source of reference as the fiscal climate improves.

Consultation Process

On January 7, 2002, the Minister of Human Resources and Employment announced a review of the Social Assistance Act and released a discussion guide, *Investing in People.* Approximately 3,000 copies of *Investing in People* were distributed, and the document was posted on the departmental Internet site. Six hundred fifty copies were sent directly to community groups and delivery agencies, with the remainder distributed through district and provincial offices. Additionally, clients were advised of the review through a cheque insert in mid-January. Audio tapes of the paper were also made available.

Responses to "Investing in People"

- Internet responses: 23
- Hits to Legislative Review website: 1,100
- E-mail responses: 10
- Letters: 51
- Workbooks: 58
- Toll-free telephone: 106 total calls (20 responses to discussion paper or questions about the review, 86 requests for the document)
- Presentations: 3
- Briefs/Community Group Submissions: 26
- Strategic Social Plan sessions: 6
- Client Focus Group participants: 64
- Community Focus Group participants: 125

The Department's staff conducted 50 focus groups to obtain a range of opinions from a number of key stakeholder groups, including persons receiving Social Assistance, community organizations and advocacy groups, the Strategic Social Plan Steering Committees, and departmental staff. The consultation process was not designed to be a consensus building exercise, but, rather, as a way to gather a range of diverse opinions and views on the future direction of Social Assistance legislation.

Client and community focus group discussions centered around the following themes: making the move from Social Assistance to work, youth, the role of the family, rights and responsibilities, flexible Social Assistance and program delivery. In addition to legislative questions, time was set aside for discussion of other issues raised by participants. Individuals independent of Human Resources and

Employment facilitated these discussions, and recording was done by an official of the Department. No electronic equipment was used to record the discussions, and no identifying information was recorded with responses.

Client Focus Groups

Clients were selected by random sample drawn from the client caseload, stratified by age, gender and reason for assistance. Focus group sessions were held with clients in Harbour Grace, St. John's, Twillingate, St. Anthony, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Nain and Wabush/Labrador City. The Department also held two youth client sessions, in Grand Falls-Windsor and Carbonear. Care was taken to ensure that feedback was obtained from a diverse group of people receiving Social Assistance in order to ensure a range of perspectives. Ten to fifteen participants were confirmed in advance of each of the nine sessions, and 64 clients participated in these sessions. To promote maximum freedom of expression about service delivery as well as legislative issues, regional/district staff did not attend client consultation sessions.

Community Group Sessions

Consultation sessions were held with community groups, advocacy groups and other partners in St. John's (2 sessions), Bay Roberts, Gander, Clarenville, Corner Brook, Happy Valley-Goose Bay (2 sessions, one general and one with aboriginal agencies), Nain, and Wabush/Labrador City. In addition, an inter-governmental consultation and a session with members of the Youth Advisory Committee were held. One hundred twenty-five representatives attended these sessions from 75 different organizations. All organizations who asked to participate had the opportunity to do so. The Premier's Council on Social Development was consulted, as well, and provided advice regarding new legislation.

Staff Focus Groups

All staff were provided with the opportunity to participate in the consultation process. Staff consultation sessions were held in each of the Department's four regions: Avalon, Central, Western, and Labrador. Many district offices held consultation sessions, and the provincial office held two sessions.

Strategic Social Plan Steering Committees

Each of the six Strategic Social Plan Steering Committees reviewed the discussion paper and provided feedback.

Profile of People Receiving Income Support

In *Investing in People*, the Department presented statistical information about its programs and services, and each consultation session began with a presentation by a departmental official. This chapter provides a summary of information about the Department of Human Resources and Employment, the programs and services it provides, and the people who receive them. As well, this section provides information in response to questions asked by people during the consultation process.

Who Receives Social Assistance?

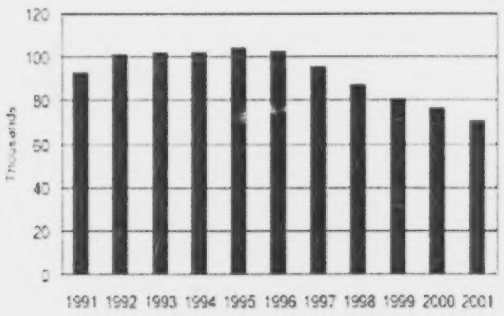
In 2001, about 53,500 adults and children, or about one-tenth of the total population of the province, received Social Assistance each month. Annually, about 71,000 adults and children received Social Assistance last year. The annual number is much greater than the monthly number because many persons receive Social Assistance for only part of the year.

In 2001, about 23,000 children in Newfoundland and Labrador, or one in five, lived in a family that received Social Assistance at some point during the year. That is a decrease of 2,300 children since 2000.

Declining Caseload

Overall, the Social Assistance caseload has been decreasing steadily since 1996.

People Receiving Social Assistance Per Year



There is a misperception that people enter the Social Assistance caseload and do not leave. In fact, more people are leaving the caseload every month than entering. In 2001, on average, approximately 2,700 adults and children left the program each month and 2,400 entered it.

Since 1991, the number of:

- Children on Social Assistance has declined by about 36% (from 35,700 to 23,000 children). To compare, during that same period, the total number of children in the province dropped by 29%, from 161,000 to 114,000.
- Adults on Social Assistance has declined by about 16% (from 57,300 to 47,900).
- Single parent families receiving Social Assistance has declined by about 15% (from 10,200 to 8,700).
- Families with children receiving Social Assistance has declined by about 30% (from 20,200 to 14,000).
- Families without children (including single people) receiving Social Assistance has increased by about 4% (from 22,500 to 23,500).

In 2001, the average number of children in families (that have children and) who were receiving Social Assistance was 1.6. The average number of children in Newfoundland and Labrador families generally is also about 1.6.

Since 1997, the number of cases[1] has declined by:

- 16% provincially;
- 11% in Avalon region;
- 22% in Central region;
- 16% in Western region; and
- 16% in Labrador region.

[1] Cases are single persons or family units and any dependent children, that receive benefits from the Department.

Duration

In 1992, 31% of cases received Social Assistance for a full twelve month period. However, by 2001, the percentage of cases receiving assistance for the full year had jumped to 57%. Similarly, during that same period, the average length of time a case received Social Assistance rose from 6.8 months to 9.1 months per year. This is probably reflective of the fact that the Social Assistance caseload has increasing numbers of people with special needs, who need additional supports, due to factors such as age and health. With continued employment growth in the Province and increased provision of supports, many of the people remaining in the program may have more complex barriers to employment.

Social Assistance and Work

Income supplements are provided to assist individuals who are working but who do not earn enough to meet their basic needs.

Single parents are the largest group of earners. Just over 18% of single parents have earnings.

In 2001, on a monthly basis, over 1,400 people who worked full-time or part-time received an income supplement because of low earnings or above average needs. Just under 3,800 individuals and families received income supplements in 2001.

A significantly higher percentage of income earners were female - 70%. Women's earnings make up about 80% of the total income earned each year by Social Assistance recipients.

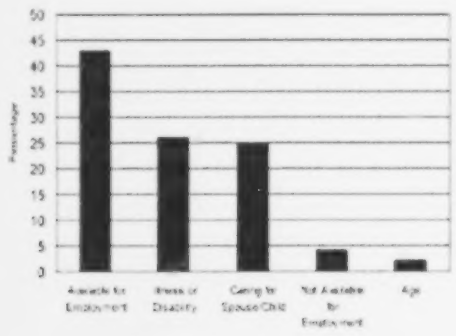
Earners tend to have slightly higher education levels than those without earnings.

People receiving Social Assistance may also receive money from other sources. Every month, just under 6,000 individuals and families declare income from sources such as Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance, Workers Compensation, Old Age Security and child support.

Reasons for Assistance

About 43% of people receiving Social Assistance indicate that their major reason for seeking assistance is unemployment, 25% that they are caring for a family member, 26% because of illness or disability and 6% because of other reasons.

Reasons for Assistance, 2001



Gender

Overall, 55% of the adult caseload is female, and 45% is male. The major gender difference is found in the 18-44 age group. In 2001, more women than men aged 18-44 received Social Assistance. This reflects the fact that women are the majority of single parents[2] and caregivers for dependent family members[3]. In addition, women employed full-time for the entire year receive, on average, an income which is about 71% that of males[4]. Women are more likely to work for minimum wage, and some professions where women dominate do not pay well and are traditionally under-valued[5].

Percentage of clients caring for others:

- 25% provincially;
- 27% in Avalon region;
- 24% in Central region;
- 23% in Western region; and
- 21% in Labrador region.

[2] Statistics Canada, Income Trends in Canada, 1980-1998

[3] Marika Morris, Gender Sensitivity Home and Community Care and CareGiving Research: A Synthesis Paper, Second Draft, prepared for Health Canada's Women's Bureau, October 2001.

[4] See note 2.

[5] Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, CD Rom, 2000.

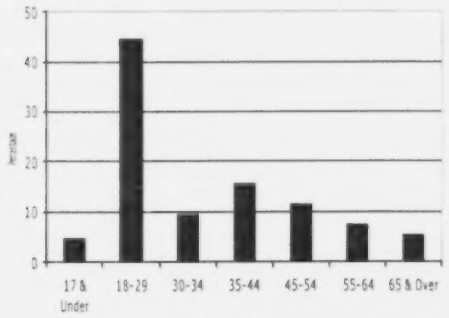
Youth (Age 18-29)

Youth are a significant part of the Social Assistance caseload. In 2001:

- 24% of adults (11,300 people) receiving Social Assistance were aged 18-29.
  - 27% (7,000) of females receiving Social Assistance were aged 18-29.
  - 20% (4,300) of males receiving Social Assistance were aged 18-29.
- 45% of new adult entrants (1,400) were aged 18-29. As recently as three years ago, in 1998, the proportion of new entrants aged 18-29 was significantly less (39%).
- About 54% of youth new entrants were women, and 46% were men.
- About 68% of youth new entrants were single people with no dependents; about 20% of youth new entrants were single parents; 7% were couples with children; and 6% were couples without children.
- 13% of youth clients had some post-secondary or had completed post-secondary education, while 11% of youth clients had not completed grade 9.
- 11% of youth new entrants were ill or were persons with a disability.

Of the 55% of 18-29 year-old clients who had not finished high school, 54% were females and 46% males.

New Clients by Age, 2001



Single, able-bodied persons under 30 who are boarding with relatives have the lowest basic rates of Social Assistance -$96 per month. Of the 7,165 youth receiving Social Assistance monthly, about 800 (11%) are eligible for this rate. In addition, recipients normally receive a drug card and other federal and provincial supports, such as the Goods and Services Tax and Harmonized Sales Tax rebates.

Social Assistance and Education

It is encouraging that high school pass rates across the Province have risen steadily from about 64% in 1989 to about 90% in 2000. However, in 2000, nearly 70% of adults receiving Social Assistance in Newfoundland and Labrador had not graduated from high school (65% of females and 74% of males). Although this is an improvement from 1991, when 79% of people receiving Social Assistance had not finished high school, there is still cause for concern.

In 2001, 36% of adult clients had not completed Grade 9.

Budgets

The total Social Assistance budget for 2002/03 is $206.7 million; the Employment and Career Services budget is $14.5 million.

Social Assistance Budget, 2002/03

Basic Benefits (food, clothing, utilities, etc.)	$124.9 M
Shelter	$66.9 M
Transportation	$4.1 M
Special and Other Needs	$10.8 M
Total	**$206.7 M**

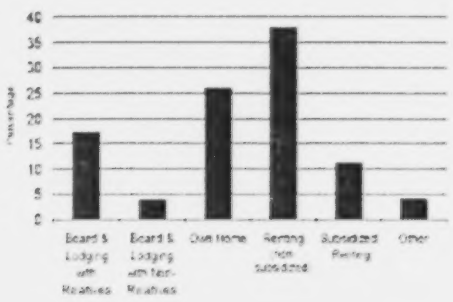
Employment and Career Services Budget, 2002/03

Employment Assistance for Persons with Disabilities	$6.6M
Employment Programming	$7.9 M
Total	**$14.5 M**

Living Arrangements

12,200 clients, or 26% of adults receiving Social Assistance, own their homes. Just over 23,400, or almost 50% of adults receiving Social Assistance, rent. Of these people, 5,000 clients, or 11% of adults receiving Social Assistance, live in subsidized rental housing.

Clients by Type of Accommodation, 2001



Telephone Access

Overall, the Department has phone numbers for 74% of adult clients. That rate varies by region with: 82% of adult clients in Western region, 78% in Central region, 69% in Avalon region and 62% in Labrador.

School Book Loan Program

In 2001/02, twelve thousand certificates were issued to eligible client families to pay for school books. Of this number, 8,424 were submitted for payment. $82,700 was spent on workbooks, and $398,000 on text books.

Drug Card

Everyone receiving Social Assistance is eligible for a drug card. In addition, people who are not Social Assistance clients may receive a drug card if their drug costs are above average, based on a financial assessment. Thus, if a person receiving Social Assistance goes to work, it is quite possible that the person will continue to be eligible for a drug card if earnings are low and drug costs high.

Approximately 61% of families and single persons receiving Social Assistance use the drug card each month. Overall, the average cost per month is $93 per case and approximately $31,574,000 annually. Seventeen thousand families or single people use the drug card every month. Couples without children and single persons have higher usage costs than families with children, since these groups include large numbers of persons with disabilities and elderly persons.

Appeals

If a person disagrees with a Social Assistance decision, he or she may appeal that decision. This is achieved through an informal level of review (speaking with a Supervisor), as well as two formal levels of review, the Regional Service Review Committee and the Social Services Appeal Board.

From March 1 to May 31, 2002, two hundred ninety-four cases were heard by regional Service Review Committees. Twenty-nine were decided in favor of the client, two were cancelled at the client's request and a further 35 appeals were received for review by committees, but were resolved at the district office level.

In 2001, the Appeal Board heard 265 appeals. Significant numbers of appeals are heard every year regarding legislative matters. If an issue is legislated, the Appeal Board has no jurisdiction to overrule the applicable legislative provision. However, the Board will hear the matter in order to ascertain if there is eligibility for the benefit or service under other sections of the legislation.

In 2001, forty-five appeals were resolved in favor of the person receiving Social Assistance. An additional 14 cases were cancelled at the client's request. Of the 265 appeals heard in 2001, two hundred fifty-six appeals were heard by telephone (97%), and 9 were heard in person (3%). Client wait time has dropped from an average of 42 days to an average of 15 calendar days since implementing telephone appeals.

Summary of Key Messages

Key messages from the consultation process are summarized below.

Adequacy of the Income Support Program

Participants stressed that the Social Assistance program is currently inadequate in many ways. Although they noted that some improvements have been made for families who receive Social Assistance, they stressed that rates are generally too low and present a hardship for many clients.

> *We don't get enough money. It's two days before grocery day and you're wondering how you're going to make six Mr. Noodles last [your family] two days.*
>
> *Youth Client Focus Group*

Participants reported that, despite the role of Social Assistance as a safety net, people receiving Social Assistance often find it difficult to cover the costs of basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing with the amount of Social Assistance they receive. They stressed, as well, that the rates do not provide adequately for laundry, furniture, excess medical costs and personal and social needs. Participants emphasized the need to adjust the rates to better reflect the cost of living and to ensure that rates can support a nutritious diet.

Participants stated that 'a telephone is not a luxury' and should be factored into current rates. They spoke of the inadequacy of the special diet allowance, fuel allowance and vision care rates. Parents of school aged-children expressed frustration at the Income Support program's failure to alleviate the costs associated with school-age children, such as lunches, extra-curricular activities, fees and school supplies. Persons with disabilities spoke strongly about the need to ensure that rates meet their medical costs, and to financially support family members caring for a person with a disability. Participants in coastal Labrador urged the Department to raise the Labrador rates to reflect the high cost of living on the coast.

Departmental response to housing issues was seen by many participants as inadequate. Participants cited the need to provide assistance for safe, adequate housing, and to ensure that rent subsidies reflect actual rental rates. Participants further stated that Social Assistance should not be reduced when clients are admitted to the hospital for more than 30 days.

Barriers to Work/Supports for Employment

The consultation process confirmed that there are significant barriers for clients who wish to leave the Social Assistance program for employment. Participants most often identified medical expenses, childcare, transportation, and lack of employment as barriers to successfully preparing for, finding and keeping employment. Earnings exemptions were most commonly cited as needing improvement. People stressed the need to 'make work pay' before many people could make the move from Social Assistance to work.

> *The barriers referred to ... are system barriers which make it more attractive for an individual to remain on Social Assistance than to work in a moderate or low paying job. Many of these barriers were inadvertently erected by both the Social Assistance system and Employment Insurance system, both of which offer supports, financial and otherwise, which are withdrawn when the client finds work.*
>
> *Brief*

People also stated that because of the rigidity of the current system, barriers to work may sometimes go unaddressed. The need for flexible, individualized supports was cited by many participants as key to helping people move into the workforce. Similarly, most participants were in favor of modifying the Social Assistance program to allow for flexible, innovative uses of funds to assist people to prepare for, find and keep work, as long as such modifications did not result in basic needs being neglected.

Partnerships

Participants consistently stressed the need for the Department to have a broad, long-term vision for the delivery of Income Support and employment and career services - a holistic vision based on assisting clients to participate fully in their communities and not simply alleviating financial distress. They identified recognition of individual needs and 'preventative medicine' as preferable to 'band-aid solutions' and a short-term vision that treats the end result of poverty. Participants pointed to the need to take a collaborative approach to addressing issues that transcend departmental boundaries, such as poverty, violence, youth

at risk, and unemployment. Participants spoke of the need to explore the reasons people access Social Assistance, to address the broader social issues of poverty, to assist people to be healthy, and to address life issues, such as violence and addictions. Participants supported initiatives such as the Strategic Social Plan, National Child Benefit and Early Childhood Development Program. Further, participants identified the need to link training with labour market demands and the development of a long-term labour market strategy.

Participants stressed the need to deliver 'seamless service' to clients, and that individual needs must not be lost in gaps between the Department and other agencies that provide services for clients. Participants similarly emphasized the importance of referrals to appropriate agencies when someone enters the system at any level. They stated that service delivery needs to be coordinated and delivered in partnership, especially with the Departments of Health and Community Services, Education, Youth Services and Post-Secondary Education and Justice, and the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

> *... provide a continuum of care in the community, based on principles of prevention and early intervention and inter-disciplinary teamwork.*
>
> *Brief*

Linkages with the community were also identified as important. Participants cited the potential for partnerships with community-based services to help fill gaps in the current system and the need to work closely with Human Resources Development Canada.

Meeting the Needs of Persons with Disabilities

The necessity to meet the needs of persons with disabilities was a common theme during the course of the review. Equal rights for persons with disabilities was identified as key, as was the promotion of inclusive and accessible benefits, programs and services. Access to clear, accurate and up-to-date information, presentation of choices and options in a fair manner, and supports to facilitate individual goals and decisions were all cited as having central importance. Participants identified the loss of the drug card, earnings exemptions that are 'too low to cover disability related expenses associated with going to work' and lack of transportation as significant employment barriers for persons with disabilities. The need to provide further sensitivity and awareness training to staff, to establish more supported employment programs, and to recognize

mental illness as a disability were also cited. Participants recommended that the Department establish a working group to identify issues and solutions, particularly for persons with mental illness.

> *The present policy of a six month extended drug card for people who find employment is quite generous, however, for those with mental illness whose drugs costs are $1,000.00 monthly, this certainly will not enhance a move towards employment.*
>
> *Brief*

Participants reported continuing confusion about the respective roles of the Departments of Human Resources and Employment and Health and Community Services and frustration by mutual clients of the two departments when trying to access programs, services and benefits. Although there were no changes in policy with the transfer, they also cited shortcomings in programs formerly administered by the Department but now administered by Health and Community Services. For example, participants stated that people who need home support may not gain financially from employment because eligibility for home supports is determined by income. Others expressed frustration with the level and types of supports available to persons with disabilities, including home support. Participants also criticized policies which make it more feasible financially for strangers to provide home support than for families to care for their members, and the 'splitting' of special needs funding between Health and Community Services and Human Resources and Employment. Some participants also urged Government to address shortcomings in programs (such as the enriched needs program) that exclude persons with mental illness. Participants spoke strongly about the need for the Department to work more closely with Health and Community Services regarding these issues.

Provision of Income Support with Dignity

The Department heard a number of messages regarding provision of Income Support with dignity. First, while some participants stated that their workers were friendly and helpful, others cited instances where staff had made them feel degraded, humiliated, disrespected or unheard. Participants said that consumers of the system must have a safe, secure means of giving feedback about service and programs. Second, participants cited the need for sensitivity training for staff, especially regarding persons with a disability, and particularly in assisting persons with a mental illness. Third, participants commonly stressed the need to have easier access to information about programs, services, and benefits, and

that this information must be available in plain language, alternative formats and in aboriginal languages. Fourth, participants cited the need for timely and courteous responses to their inquiries and requests.

There was general support for less intrusive and more dignified ways of delivering Social Assistance. Participants also stressed the need to continue to provide one-on-one personal services and to maintain the ability for clients to speak to staff face-to-face. Participants also expressed concern about the possibility of missed opportunities to provide counseling and make connections with clients if access is only through telephone and mail service.

The Role of the Family

The majority of participants believed that families have an important role to play in supporting their relatives, but that the Social Assistance rates for shelter should be the same whether a person is living with or renting from family or non-family. Participants' reasons included the need to support the family and to value the role that families can play.

> *Families should be encouraged and supported to care for family members to the greatest extent possible. Oftentimes, policies around payments to relatives discourage such arrangements. There is a need to re-define "relative" in the context of twenty first century societal needs as opposed to historical or traditional consideration.*
>
> *Brief*

There was no consensus regarding whether the roles and responsibilities of family are defined appropriately. However, there was only minimal support for raising the age threshold for consideration of parental income past age 21. Some participants thought that 18 or 19 should be the cutoff, associating these ages with financial and legal independence, while others were satisfied with the age 21 threshold.

Mandatory or Voluntary Participation in Employment and Career Planning

Participants were divided on the issue of whether clients should have the option of choosing to participate in employment and career planning. Strong arguments were put forward on both sides of this issue. Proponents of voluntary participation most often spoke of a fear of 'workfare' and the futility of forced participation, the potential for discrimination inherent in mandatory participation and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes caused by mandatory participation.

Those in favor of mandatory participation, on the other hand, wanted to make Social Assistance a 'temporary measure' for those who are able to work and suggested that requiring such participation might reduce perceived inter-generational dependency on Social Assistance. Participants expressed support for 'strongly encouraging people' and supporting people to prepare for, find and keep work. There was also broad support for building a society where all citizens have an opportunity to participate fully in their community, including participation in the labour market.

Youth

Opinions were diverse regarding whether youth should be required to participate in active measures as a condition of receiving Social Assistance. Most participants in client focus groups and youth focus groups felt that youth should be required to participate in active measures as a condition of receiving Social Assistance. On the other hand, participants in community group sessions, those who submitted briefs, and the general public held widely divergent opinions on the issue. While there was again widespread support for strong encouragement to participate in career planning and training and for flexibility in meeting the needs of young people, nevertheless, whether mandatory or voluntary approaches should be used was a matter of debate. Participants who favored mandatory participation cited reasons such as the need to make people accountable for the assistance they receive, the need to ensure that youth are informed about all their choices, and that 'sometimes people need a push'. Those who favored voluntary participation spoke of reasons like the futility of forced participation, the possibility of age discrimination, and best allocation of resources.

> *We must ensure young people are aware of the supports available to them, and are provided the information in a youth-friendly way. We must engage young people in a meaningful way in the policy, planning and implementation of programs that will affect them ... .*
>
> *Brief*

Most participants identified meeting the needs of youth as a significant issue for the Department. While the supports identified to help youth move to the workforce were similar to the supports needed by other clients (childcare, transportation assistance, assistance with medical needs, and clothing),

participants stressed, as well, the need for early intervention and for partnering with educators to deliver career counseling, and to provide incentives to stay in school and other supports to youth at risk.

Priority for Employment and Career Supports

Although the majority of participants stated that youth and Social Assistance recipients should be priorities for employment and career supports (as opposed to providing funding supports to other persons in the general public), a significant number of responses advocated for no priority or for priority for everyone. Groups most frequently identified for priority, in addition to youth and Social Assistance recipients, were single parents and persons with disabilities.

Accountability

Significant consensus regarding the rights and responsibilities of clients and of the Department was evident on: privacy and confidentiality, the right to service with dignity, meeting basic needs, and access to information about services, programs and benefits, in plain language and alternative formats. Client responsibilities most often noted were to provide accurate information, to respect staff and to pursue self-sufficiency to the extent possible.

Regarding whether the current penalties for people who contravene the Act are appropriate, roughly equal numbers of participants stated that current penalties are either appropriate, too stiff, or too lenient.

Appeals

There was no consensus regarding how well the appeals process is working. While some participants stated that the process was working well, others stated their displeasure with or ambivalence about the process. Access to telephone appeals was supported as a measure to reduce waiting times. Criticisms of the appeal process included length, difficulty of access, and intimidating format. Suggestions for improvement included having a past or present client on the Appeal Board, improving access to information about the appeals process, and providing a client advocate for appellants.

What People Said: Specific Responses

Responses are reported by reference to the discussion guide questions. For reporting purposes, some questions have been combined in this summary.

A. SCOPE OF THE LEGISLATION - A NEW VISION

Should the new legislation address both providing Social Assistance and helping people prepare for, find, and maintain employment?

The vast majority of participants stated that new legislation should address both providing Social Assistance and helping people prepare for, find, and maintain employment. Participants also stressed that new legislation should recognize that some people simply will not be able to work, and that the Department should continue to focus on providing Social Assistance with dignity. In addition, participants urged the Department not to confine itself only to Social Assistance but to link with other departments and agencies in order to provide services in a holistic manner.

Participants suggested that many people have difficulty moving from Social Assistance to work without help, and they may need incentives, assistance and support to overcome their employment barriers.

While most participants supported the concept of including both Income Support and Employment and Career Services in the legislation, some participants had reservations regarding a change without sufficient reflection. They stated concerns about:

> *... the main focus should be addressing the issues of poverty. The employment piece should be secondary.*
>
> *Workbook*

Inclusion: The Department must include a focus on those who are not able to work in addition to those preparing for, finding and keeping work. Many participants stressed that employment supports should not come at the expense of other fundamental rights and services, including the receipt of Social Assistance with dignity.

Resources: Concerns were expressed regarding adequate staffing and financial resources to meet the needs of both programs.

> *People's need for Income Support relates to their basic survival in terms of their access to food, shelter, transportation and a safe environment in which they can live. Once these basic human needs are addressed, then and only then, can people focus on helping themselves move toward economic stability and independence.*
>
> *Brief*

Duplication of services: Income and Employment Support legislation should not mandate a duplication of services provided by other government departments, such as Education; Youth Services and Post-Secondary Education; Industry, Trade, and Rural Development; and Human Resources Development Canada.

Overlap of Social Assistance and other programs: Some participants stated that new legislation should not address both, saying that Social Assistance should not be associated with employment programs, or that Social Assistance should be eliminated and replaced with a guaranteed annual income.

If the legislation should be more broadly focused, what are the key issues it should address?

Key issues most often identified included: reducing the barriers to employment faced by people receiving Social Assistance; supporting all individuals as they move into the workforce; providing educational and training supports (including assistance with literacy, adult basic education, and post-secondary supports); providing employment and career planning; meeting the needs of persons with disabilities; and providing adequate, flexible and dignified Income Support. Many other issues were identified and are reflected throughout the report.

GOVERNMENT HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE DIGNIFIED ACCESS TO SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN ASSISTING PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE TO THE LEVEL OF THEIR ABILITY IN THE LABOUR MARKET. WHAT ARE THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CLIENTS AND OTHER PARTNERS (FAMILIES, OTHER AGENCIES, EMPLOYERS)?

Roles and responsibilities identified for people receiving Social Assistance included:

- To become as financially and personally self-sufficient as possible - to become participants in the program, rather than recipients.
- To identify the supports they need to move into employment.
- To provide accurate information and to report changes in circumstances that affect eligibility.
- To treat staff with respect.
- To request clarification where required.

Most participants identified the role of families as providing emotional and job-search support, and the role of Government as providing Social Assistance. Some participants stated that the role of families is to provide community access, or to help out financially where they can. Many participants thought that families were doing more than their 'fair share', and that it is unrealistic and unfair to expect families to financially assist relatives who are receiving Social Assistance.

> *It should be an expectation that they [clients] participate fully in addressing the barriers to full employment and financial independence. An environment should be provided which is conducive to such a collaborative approach. This is not to negate government's responsibility for securing opportunities for accessible and affordable education and for full employment.*
>
> *E-mail*

Some participants stated that the role of community agencies is to partner and link with Government, to raise the awareness of the general public and government about issues affecting clients and to provide information and training.

Participants identified the role of employers as one of partnership and support, including:

- Partnering with government in job creation.
- Maintaining employment after a wage subsidy ends.
- Employing Social Assistance recipients, including persons with disabilities.
- Becoming informed about disabilities and providing workplace accommodations.
- Providing adequate benefits (including health benefits) and training to all employees.
- Providing feedback to employees.
- Providing clear job descriptions.
- Being flexible and understanding of employee needs.

B. ENSURING STABLE AND DIGNIFIED SOCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT

IS THE DEPARTMENT ACCOMPLISHING ITS GOAL OF PROVIDING DIGNIFIED SOCIAL ASSISTANCE? ARE THE INTERVENTIONS ENABLING PEOPLE TO MANAGE THEIR OWN AFFAIRS? ARE THE MEASURES USED BY THE DEPARTMENT SUFFICIENT AND CONSISTENT WITH THE DIRECTION NEW LEGISLATION SHOULD TAKE?

Examples of measures identified by participants as positive and as moving toward Social Assistance with dignity include the move away from intrusive measures, direct deposits, discontinuation of 'archaic' home visits, extended drug card, self application process, the Services Inquiry Unit, Support Worker Application Program, the philosophical shift evidenced by changing job titles from Financial Assistance Officer to Client Services Officer, and the Department's name change.

There was general support for less intrusive and more dignified ways of delivering Social Assistance. However, participants urged the Department to continue to provide one-on-one personal services and to maintain the ability for clients to speak to staff face-to-face. In addition, participants expressed concern that a move to telephone and mail service will lessen opportunities to provide counseling and make connections with clients. In addition, some participants stressed that not all people receiving Social Assistance have

> *The mail-in self application process is a commendable one as long as there is an alternative for the person with literacy issues, or the person who requires assistance in completing the application. Human contact and troubleshooting need to have a role, and should not be eliminated completely, as it likely makes clients more vulnerable and at risk.*
>
> *Brief*

phones or bank accounts, thus precluding their access to direct deposit and limiting their access to appeals and applications by telephone.

While participants noted the progress that had been made, suggestions for improvement included the following:

Implementing more efficient administrative practices: Participants cited the need to reduce red tape that delays assistance; have less frequent changes in workers assigned to people; address difficulties in replacing stolen cheques that make people feel 'like criminals'; and address difficulties in accessing complex programs or benefits and authorizations for medical transportation.

Requiring less scrutiny and personal information: Some participants stated that the amount of scrutiny and information required by the Department is excessive, that 'the need to constantly repeat one's story is not dignified', that there is sometimes excessive security (e.g., secure reception areas) and that the 'spouse-in-the-house' rule is discriminatory and imposes excessive scrutiny on clients' living arrangements.

> *[There needs to be] more knowledge and awareness from front line staff. People are marginalized because their illness/disabilities are not recognized. There needs to be consistency, sensitivity and awareness.*
>
> *Community Focus Group*

Providing training for staff to better interact with the employer community and to be more sensitive.

Reducing stigma by seeking alternatives to practices that identify people as Social Assistance recipients, such as the drug card, requiring people to come into the office to pick up their first cheque, school book vouchers, payment of municipal taxes, vision care, mortgage verification, invoices issued to outside businesses that identify people as Social Assistance recipients, and direct payments to Newfoundland Light and Power, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation and some individual landlords.

Addressing barriers to care-givers, e.g., improving benefits and supports for families who support relatives receiving Social Assistance. Participants stated that Government needs to improve supports for people caring for disabled family members and be more consistent in the approach across government departments.

Ensuring that Social Assistance rates are sufficient to eat healthily, have a social life, buy basic furnishings, have a telephone, find suitable accommodations, and consider individual circumstances.

Improving consideration for the needs of persons with disabilities, such as: applying independent living and inclusion lenses to legislation policies and access to programs; providing better access to information and individualized supports; addressing barriers to accessing benefits, especially for persons with mental illness and other disabilities; ensuring that policies meet the needs of all individuals equally; requiring that inclusion and workplace accommodation requirements be part of agreements with third parties; de-linking disability related supports from Income Support; and recognizing mental illness as a disabling condition for purposes of additional supports/benefits.

Ensuring equality for all persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or reason for assistance; empowering people who receive Social Assistance; ensuring that clients are active participants in making decisions and finding solutions; and enshrining within the legislation a right to dignity and respect.

Providing more comprehensive supports, e.g., counseling and training in life-skills and budgeting for people receiving Social Assistance; opportunities for people receiving Social Assistance to upgrade their skills through equivalency exams and Adult Basic Education; and personal contact or home visits with clients.

> *Without the option to speak directly ... the client becomes a number, not an individual.*
>
> *Workbook*

Recognizing individual circumstances, such as discontinuing current policies that require assistance to be decreased or discontinued when a person is admitted to hospital.

Discontinuing premature suspensions before investigations are complete.

Providing better access to information, such as: providing applicants with an information booklet that lists all services provided by the Department and their responsibilities; educating the public about the realities of Social Assistance; and providing materials in plain language, alternative formats and aboriginal languages.

> *Public education is needed so that Social Assistance is seen as credibly as Old Age Security or Employment Insurance. Increased awareness of the possibility that one's life circumstance can change rapidly and anyone may need to avail of Social Assistance is needed. As well, awareness is needed to reinforce that one does not necessarily stay on Social Assistance for a lifetime.*
>
> *Community Focus Group*

Ensuring consistent application of policy so that individuals in like circumstances are treated in the same fashion.

Improving service by holding front line staff accountable for the way they treat people; ensuring that clients receive one-on-one and in-person assistance as required; implementing a process to enable clients to provide feedback on service and programs; improving response times to inquiries and access to departmental representatives; and ensuring that staff provide persons with disabilities with the entire range of employment supports and options.

Improving linkages with other departments, agencies and the community to ensure seamless service.

CERTAIN CLAUSES IN THE CURRENT LEGISLATION ACKNOWLEDGE THE ROLE THAT FAMILIES AND RELATIVES PLAY IN SUPPORTING THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS. SPECIFICALLY, PEOPLE WHO BOARD OR RENT FROM FAMILY MEMBERS RECEIVE LESS SOCIAL ASSISTANCE THAN THOSE WHO DO NOT. HAS THE ROLE OF FAMILY MEMBERS BEEN IDENTIFIED APPROPRIATELY? HOW SHOULD 'RELATIVE' BE DEFINED?

The majority of participants believed that families have an important role to play in supporting their relatives, but that the Social Assistance rates for shelter should be the same whether a person is living with or renting from family or non-family. Participants spoke of the need to support the family and to value the role that families can play. They stated that families are often the best people to provide emotional, personal and other supports, but they need adequate pay. Some participants noted that landlords who rent to relatives should not be penalized by being paid less than for non-relatives.

As well, some participants stated that:

- Affordability is the biggest factor when choosing where a person will live, even though it should be only one of many factors.
- Distinguishing between relatives and non-relatives implies that the cost of feeding and boarding a relative is less or that relatives should expect hardship when boarding with their family.
- Whether less money is given to someone living with relatives should be done on a case-by-case basis.
- Government must assist the family to perform its social purposes, including caring for the young, the sick and the elderly.

> *It is not the definition of relative that is the issue, but the expectation of the relative in relation to the Social Assistance recipient.*
>
> *Brief*

When asked how 'relative' should be defined, some participants said that the Department should not define relative at all, since the same rate should be applicable whether one is living with family or a non-relative. Other participants highlighted the fact that there should be a standardized definition of relative for all departmental purposes.

Participants who defined 'relative' suggested the following definitions:

- Those related by blood, marriage or upbringing, including caregivers.
- Parents.
- Cousins, siblings, parents, grandparents, children.
- Common law spouses.
- Immediate family (parents, siblings).
- Parents, children.
- Immediate family plus grandparents.
- Parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle.

The definitions most commonly suggested were 'those related by blood or marriage' and 'parents'.

Should the legislation require the Minister to periodically review the rates established for Social Assistance and report to Cabinet, and/or table an annual report in the House of Assembly?

Participants agreed overwhelmingly that periodic reviews are necessary, and most people suggested that the rates should be higher. Many people stated that cost of living should be reflected in the rates, and that rates should be indexed using the Consumer Price Index. Participants expressed concern about the adequacy of the rates to meet food, clothing and shelter needs. In addition, some participants suggested that a report be distributed in the broader community, not just to Cabinet, as a practical accountability measure for citizens. This report could illustrate how the Department spends public funds and show the effectiveness of its programs and services in addressing citizens' needs.

> *Periodic assessment is one measure of quality and can be used to review the entire system to ensure the program is meeting its mandate, but more importantly, servicing the people of this province.*
>
> *Internet*

Participants agreed that the requirement of an annual report should continue. Participants identified the public report, available to clients and citizens generally, as an important accountability measure and as a way of maintaining the transparency of government. It was identified also as a means of informing the House of Assembly about the Social Assistance program. Some participants suggested that the reports should be more

detailed and contain, for example, caseload statistics, appeals statistics, inter-jurisdictional comparisons, input from people receiving Social Assistance, a synopsis of program changes and their rationale, and evidence that legislation and policy are achieving their objectives. A 'social audit' by an independent body was suggested as another alternative.

C. REMOVING BARRIERS TO WORK

ARE THE INITIATIVES THE DEPARTMENT HAS TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO WORK CONSISTENT WITH THE DIRECTION THAT NEW LEGISLATION SHOULD TAKE? **(Initiatives include: $45/month for Mother Baby Nutritional Supplements; $325/month for the first child and $125/month for each additional child to cover childcare services, where licensed child care is not available; six month extended drug card for people who leave Social Assistance for employment reasons; and the ability to retain up to $150/month earnings (family) and $75/month of earnings (singles) before Social Assistance benefits are reduced.)** WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES, ARE THERE AREAS THAT SHOULD BE GIVEN PRIORITY FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT? NEW INITIATIVES?

Participants agreed overwhelmingly that the initiatives taken so far are positive and consistent with the direction that new legislation should take. However, many stated that programs, services and benefits need to be further improved, and that flexible initiatives are required to meet individuals' needs. Participants indicated that initiatives must 'make work pay' and enable people to move into the workforce.

Many initiatives were identified as priorities for improvement during the course of the consultation. Earnings exemptions of $150 per family and $75 per single person ($190 and $95 for persons with disabilities) were the most frequently cited area for improvement. Participants said the recent increase to the exemptions is a good start but that they are too low to adequately support a move to the workforce, or to make extra work hours pay for people receiving assistance. The drug card program, transportation allowance and childcare subsidies were also frequently identified as ones to be further improved. The need to address the lack of suitable housing for

some people receiving Social Assistance was also stressed. Some people cited the need to further improve programs that assist persons with a disability to access job opportunities and training. Other new initiatives and areas for improvement are detailed in a later section, "Other Issues and Areas for Improvement."

D. HELPING PEOPLE PREPARE FOR, FIND, AND KEEP A JOB THROUGH ACTIVE TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT MEASURES

SHOULD PARTICIPATION IN AN EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER PLAN BE MANDATORY OR VOLUNTARY FOR CLIENTS IN RECEIPT OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE? IF MANDATORY PARTICIPATION WERE REQUIRED, SHOULD EXCEPTIONS BE MADE? TO WHOM SHOULD THE EXCEPTIONS APPLY?

While some participants thought that participation in an employment and career plan should be mandatory, there was also strong opposition to the idea. Overall, there was support for 'strongly encouraging people' in their efforts to join or rejoin the labour market and supporting people to prepare for, find and keep work. There was also broad support for building a society where all citizens have an opportunity to participate fully in their community, including participation in the labour market. A telephone survey conducted in Newfoundland and Labrador by Corporate Research Associates Atlantic in February 2002 revealed that 80% of survey participants strongly or generally favored requiring Social Assistance clients to complete an employment and career plan[6].

Participants in Favor of Mandatory Participation

Participants who felt that participation should be mandatory said that:

- More people would participate.
- People should be accountable for the Social Assistance they receive.
- Social Assistance should be seen as a temporary measure for those able to work while they look for a job.
- Mandatory participation could help reduce inter-generational dependency.
- Mandatory employment counseling could focus, educate, inform, and empower people.

[6] The random sample survey consisted of telephone interviews with a representative sample of 401 people in the Province. A sample of this size would be expected to produce results accurate to within + or - 4.9% in 19 out of 20 samples.

Ideas about how a mandatory process should work varied greatly. Some participants stated that individuals should have to participate in an initial in-depth assessment when they apply for Social Assistance. Other participants stated that 'single able-bodied' people should have to do resume writing, career exploration, attend information sessions or volunteer, or that people should be referred to a mandatory appointment with a Career Development Specialist as part of the initial application process.

> *A developed career plan is essential for any person to become a productive member of society, and as such should be mandatory. These plans must be developed in a way that is meaningful for the individual involved, including their long term goals and aspirations, and not merely those of the facilitator.*
>
> *Brief*

Caveats to mandatory participation included the need to address barriers to working and to provide adequate supports and information before employment counseling could be mandatory, and that additional resources would need to be devoted to this area in order for it to be a success. Other participants stated that follow up would be essential.

Participants in Favor of Voluntary Participation

Participants favoring voluntary participation said that most people receiving Social Assistance wish to leave Social Assistance quickly and would willingly participate in employment and career counseling, training and other active measures.

They supported individual choice rather than mandatory participation and stated that by providing appropriate supports and incentives people would be strongly encouraged to participate of their own accord, without being forced to participate. Other comments included:

> *If you spread limited resources too thin, the people who need the resources do not get enough. If you force people to do something- they will just go through the motions.*
>
> *Intergovernmental Focus Group*

- A mandatory approach ignores the fact that not all people are able to work.
- Access to training programs and employment opportunities is limited in some areas, and training and education are of limited use if there are no jobs.

- To make employment and career planning mandatory would be discrimination against people receiving Social Assistance.
- Mandatory participation would not recognize barriers such as education levels, lack of transportation, health issues, access to childcare, and access to disability related supports.
- People need to have their basic needs met before they can be required to do anything further.
- Mandatory participation perpetuates negative stereotypes about 'people on welfare'.
- Mandatory participation is adversarial by nature, does not empower people and is not in keeping with dignified Social Assistance.
- To impose mandatory participation and then carve out exceptions would be a bureaucratic nightmare for the Department.
- Mandatory participation in employment and career planning would be 'setting up the precedents for workfare'.
- Time and resources should be directed at people who are interested in the services offered, since they are the ones who will receive the most benefit from them.
- Long-term investments in human and labour market development and maintaining a reasonable minimum standard of living are preferable to forced participation.

Proposed exceptions to mandatory participation included:

- Elderly persons.
- People with illness or physical, psychological, developmental, or social disability.
- Short term clients who are still attached to the workforce.
- Single parents.
- Single parents with small children.
- Persons experiencing domestic violence or divorce.
- Exceptions on a case-by-case basis, according to individual circumstances.

Should the legislation target youth as the priority for available resources for employment and career supports? Are there other groups that should be given priority for employment and career supports?

While many participants agreed that youth should be a priority for employment and career supports, some participants said that everyone should have priority and that resources should be available to all. Others stated that there should be no priority at all because prioritization creates an internal class system and is discriminatory.

> *Equality and equity should be the priority principles when resources are distributed. Do not further marginalize older unemployed people and other groups by denying us resources.*
>
> *Brief*

Participants in favor of priority for youth gave the following reasons:

- Youth's mobility.
- Employers may be more likely to hire a younger person.
- The need to reduce inter-generational dependence.
- Youth have a longer time to show their potential and participate in the workforce, so prioritizing youth may be a better return on Government's investment.
- The need to empower youth and increase their self-esteem.
- Youth are at a critical age for successful interventions and they are more flexible and open to change.

Some participants noted that other departments and agencies provide services for youth, e.g., the Department of Youth Services and Post-Secondary Education, where the needs of youth may already be addressed.

In addition to youth, the groups most frequently identified for employment and career supports were persons with disabilities (including mentally ill persons), single parents, and those with a strong willingness and drive to participate. Other groups identified were Social Assistance recipients, youth from 'troubled homes', minority groups, the working poor, older workers, marginalized persons, families with children, women, single able-bodied persons, new immigrants, victims of violence, widows, aboriginal persons,

people who have not graduated from high school, people with post-secondary education, injured workers, people who have been laid-off recently, and persons with the best chance at employment.

Should youth be required to participate in active measures such as employment and career counseling, academic upgrading, training courses, and pre-employment programs as a condition of receiving Social Assistance?

Most participants in client focus groups and youth focus groups felt that youth should be required to participate in active measures as a condition of receiving Social Assistance. On the other hand, participants in community group sessions, those who submitted briefs and the general public held diverse viewpoints on this issue. While there was again widespread support for strong encouragement to participate in career planning and training and for flexibility in meeting the needs of young people, nevertheless, whether mandatory or voluntary approaches should be used was a matter of debate. A random sample telephone survey conducted in Newfoundland and Labrador in February 2002 by Corporate Research Associates Atlantic regarding this issue revealed that 83% of survey participants either strongly favored or generally favored requiring youth to participate in education and/or training programs as a condition of receiving Social Assistance.

> *[Participation] should be mandatory so that people who can work, go to work, and there's more money for those who need Social Assistance.*
>
> *Client Focus Group*

Participants in favor of mandatory participation said that:

- 'Sometimes people need a push.'
- This could ensure that youth know all the choices and options open to them and make informed decisions about their future.
- People need to be accountable for the assistance they receive.
- People should receive less money if they don't participate.

Many participants agreed that participation in employment and career planning should be considered, but that programs must be flexible and address the varied needs of youth, including life skills training, education and counseling.

Many other participants felt strongly that participation in these programs should be encouraged, not forced. Some participants noted that instead of forcing a person to participate, the Department should assist in addressing the reasons he or she is not currently participating.

> *Compelling someone to do something in order to get Social Assistance ...doesn't work. You can't force people to do training. They won't be successful at it ... The end result should be this person wants this.*
>
> *Community Focus Group*

Participants opposed to mandatory participation stated that:

- Mandatory participation only for youth would be age discrimination.
- People forced to engage in these measures would not be successful at them, and forced participation might only serve to make it difficult for people who really want to be there.
- Mandatory participation would be a waste of money, considering a challenging youth labour market, both in Newfoundland and Labrador, and across the country.
- Mandatory participation would run counter to the flexibility that the Department proposes.
- The Department does not have sufficient resources to require youth to participate in active measures.

Should employment and career programs place a priority on helping people who are receiving Social Assistance?

The majority of participants agreed that persons receiving Social Assistance should have priority access to employment and career programs. Reasons included:

> *The focus should be clients, however, information packages or sessions should be available to non-clients as well.*
>
> *Staff Focus Group*

- The expenditure of resources would be justified by the return on the investment.
- People receiving Social Assistance need these programs the most to help them gain 'a more equal footing'.
- Such programs could help empower people receiving Social Assistance and could play a role in 'breaking the cycle'.
- People receiving Social Assistance are an 'untapped resource' for the labour market.

However, a significant number of participants said, as well, that employment and career programs should be available and accessible to all or that the working poor in addition to Social Assistance recipients should have priority for these programs.

> *No, they [employment and career programs] should be available to everyone regardless of income level or origin.*
>
> *Workbook*

In the case of single, employable youth under 21 years living with relatives, current legislation requires the total family income of the youth's parents/guardians to be taken into account when assessing the youth's eligibility for Social Assistance.

Are the roles and responsibilities of family defined appropriately for this purpose?

There was no consensus regarding whether the roles and responsibilities of family are defined appropriately. However, there was only minimal support for raising the age threshold for consideration of parental income past age 21.

> *Total family income should not be regarded when assessing for assistance. People of 21 years of age are supposed to be notably independent persons ...*
>
> *Brief*

Many participants stated that the roles and responsibilities of family were not defined appropriately because parents' income should not be considered once a person reaches the age of 18 or 19, the usual ages of legal and financial independence. Other reasons included termination of the Canada Child Tax Benefit and Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit at age 18, and graduation of most students from high school at that age.

A significant number of participants noted that people may not get any financial support from parents even though they live in the same house, and that people living with family members should be treated in the same manner as people living alone or with non-relatives. Participants noted that the ability of persons aged 18-21 to find a job depends on where they live.

Many participants advocated for an individualized approach when determining whether parental income should be considered. Participants expressed concern about people under age 21 whose parents' income is marginally higher than the threshold for eligibility for Social Assistance. Some participants proposed that eligibility for people under the age of 21 should be tied to a higher threshold, e.g., the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit threshold. Others suggested that if people aged 18-21 receive Social Assistance, it should be tied to successfully completing high school or participation in an employment and career plan, or that parental income should not be considered after a person has been out of high school for a year.

> *If someone is living with their parents, why should someone else support them? If parents have the resources they should help.*
>
> *Client Focus Group*

Other participants stated that family roles were adequately defined and that parental income should be considered for applicants up to the age of 21. Reasons included parents or guardians having an obligation to provide for their offspring where they are able to do so, other agencies such as Student Aid having similar practices and that it should not be too easy for people to get Social Assistance when they turn 18 years old.

Other cutoff ages proposed by a small number of participants included 22, 24, 25, and 30. Reasons for a higher age included:

- Taxpayers should not subsidize children from financially comfortable families.
- The need to discourage people from applying for Social Assistance.
- It takes four years to finish many post-secondary programs, and people are often dependent on parents during this time.

What exceptions, if any, should be made?

Many participants proposed individual, flexible assessments, instead of a system based on a general rule with exceptions. A few participants stated that to decrease abuse of the system there should be no exceptions.

> *There are no easy answers. No matter what age you pick, there are always exceptions. The assessment piece needs to be looked at.*
>
> *Community Focus Group*

Proposed exceptions included situations where:

- The family refuses, or there is insufficient family income, to support the applicant.
- The applicant is funded by Health and Community Services, has been in protective care, or is being abused or neglected.
- Only one parent is residing with the applicant.
- The applicant is living with family while attending high school or post-secondary school.
- The applicant has a dependent child.
- The applicant is somewhat financially independent of his/her parents.
- The applicant has spent time in correctional facilities.
- The applicant has a disability.
- The applicant is unable to make decisions on his or her own behalf.

Should legislation give authority to the Minister to redirect Social Assistance funds,o n an individual case basis, to provide active employment supports? This could mean that where a person is eligible to receive Social Assistance and identifies a desire for specific training or other employment related support that the Social Assistance funds could be redirected to those purposes identified by the client for a specified period of time.

Participants strongly supported making Social Assistance flexible in order to meet individual needs. Many participants emphasized, however, that those who require supports other than employment supports must not be forgotten. Suggestions to make flexible Social Assistance most successful included:

- Implementing a client driven approach to guide the process, enshrining the principle of self-determination, and the use of career planning.
- Providing clear guidelines to ensure that flexibility does not lead to inconsistency, political interference, or abuse; extensive accountability measures would be needed.
- Providing employment facilitators for persons with disabilities.
- Ensuring that people receiving Social Assistance know their rights and entitlements.
- Ensuring that people receive enough assistance to meet their basic needs.

- Delegating flexibility to front-line staff to make decisions, and ensuring that staff are properly trained to have a sound basis for decision making.
- Providing training in budgeting for participants as part of the process.
- Undergoing periodic reviews of the process.
- Implementing contingency provisions for emergency situations where people must return to the program.

> *People should have the "right" to take the risk - but there should be a contingency plan in place, e.g., what if there's an emergency?*
>
> *Community Focus Group*

Some participants answered no to this question, saying that adequate resources for both Income Support and employment support should be available so that there would be no need to redirect funds.

Other participants expressed concern that it is unrealistic to give people lump sum payments and not expect them to reapply for Social Assistance within a short period of time, or that rates should not be cut to provide employment supports. Other questions/concerns included:

- Who determines where the redirected money should go?
- Will clients lose some of their money to 'pay' for the training?
- Where would the funding be redirected from?
- Would fewer dollars be available for others who need assistance?

E. ACCOUNTABILITY

What client rights and responsibilities should the new legislation identify?

Client rights identified most frequently were the rights to appeal; privacy and confidentiality; fair, equitable and timely service; dignity; and access to information. Rights included:

Confidentiality and privacy: To not have information transferred without permission, to have personal information safeguarded, to access personal files and to have corrections made, to know how their information will be used, and to have access to an appeals process for breaches of privacy and confidentiality.

Information: To access information easily regarding benefits, programs and services, in plain language, alternative formats, and in one's first language; to be fully informed of rights, responsibilities and the consequences for non-compliance; and to be fully informed about the new legislation.

> *The Act should clearly state that all persons have the right to pursue employment with the provision of appropriate supports.*
>
> *Brief*

Economic security: To have basic needs met, to earn a fair wage in an appropriate job, and to pursue employment with the appropriate supports.

Housing: To live independently in adequate and secure housing.

Dignity/individuality: To be treated as an individual with dignity, to be treated with cultural sensitivity, to be served in one's first language, to access appropriate supports, and to have a 'Client Charter of Rights'.

Equitable programs: Access to dignified, fair and equitable programs and services.

Choice: To be presented with options and real choices, to be able to choose a face-to-face method of service delivery, and to receive services without having to participate in mandatory employment programs.

Education/self-improvement: To have the ability to pursue education, training and self-improvement.

Appeal: To appeal, within a reasonable time frame, with the support of advocates or representatives; to have a speedy review if a situation changes; to be told of the reasons for an appeal decision; and to be "treated as innocent until proven guilty".

Assessment: To have eligibility for benefits, programs and services fairly and consistently assessed; and to have policies applied consistently.

Service: To have a consistent worker, to be notified of changes in worker assignments, to have timely responses to phone calls and inquiries, and to see a worker within 5 days.

Suggested client responsibilities included:

Provision of information: To be forthcoming and honest with information; to accept responsibility for a failure to provide accurate information; to report changes in circumstances that affect eligibility, including earnings; and to provide all required information before assistance is issued except in exceptional situations, e.g., victims of violence.

Respect: To respect staff and their decisions.

Self-sufficiency: To pursue self-sufficiency to the extent possible.

> *Clients need to be responsible to provide accurate information to the Department and to use the resources available to improve their position in life.*
>
> *Workbook*

Some participants noted that accountability is a 'two-way street' and that Government must also be accountable. Departmental responsibilities identified included:

Collaboration with people receiving Social Assistance: To help clients to increase self-sufficiency and to assist them to secure educational and employment opportunities.

Service: To provide training and flexibility for staff; to provide holistic service, including counseling; to provide the best possible service in a prompt, consistent and efficient manner; and to treat all people with dignity and respect.

Accountability: To ensure that resources go to those who need them, to monitor the users of the system closely, to provide to taxpayers a good accounting of how money is spent, and to absorb the consequences of its errors and not set up overpayments as a result of mistakes made by staff.

Privacy and confidentiality: To ensure that client files are accurate and confidential and that information is shared only with those for whom the client has given consent to share; and to ensure that clients give informed consent regarding the use of their information.

Equality: To recognize same sex couples as family units and to treat all people equally and with respect.

Are the penalties for those who do not comply with the legislation appropriate?

Participants were divided on this issue. Roughly equal numbers of participants stated that current penalties are either appropriate, too stiff, or too lenient.

Statements by participants who felt that penalties are too stiff included:

- Jail is not appropriate for this type of offence.
- People receiving Social Assistance do not have money to pay a fine.
- Options such as community service provisions or mandatory counseling sessions should be pursued.
- Repayment provisions should replace current penalties.

> *A fine probably won't get collected, and it is too costly to imprison people. A more appropriate penalty would be community service.*
>
> *Workbook*

Participants criticized the perceived policy of suspending clients before an investigation is complete. This practice is seen to 'create undue hardship and presume guilt before it is proven.' Other participants said that more effort should be concentrated on exploring the reasons why people do not comply with the legislation and that people's responsibilities could be more clearly explained. Others stated that enforcement, rather than changing penalties, needs to be the focus.

Participants who felt that penalties are too lenient suggested that:

- People who do not comply with the rules should be cut off Social Assistance.
- Fines should be raised.

- 'Penalties don't fit the crime', or that 'Social Assistance is gotten too easily and stricter guidelines are needed'. Others perceived abuse of the system by people receiving Social Assistance, and stated that 'clients who are able to work need to be more accountable'.

> *People ... defrauding government should be charged, fined, [or] jailed for a longer period of time.*
>
> *Workbook*

- Repeat offenders should be dealt with more severely.
- Penalties should mirror the penalties for fraud in the Criminal Code, or the Criminal Code should be used instead of the Social Assistance Act.
- More investigators should be hired and the penalty provisions used more frequently.

F. A FAIR AND EFFICIENT APPEALS PROCESS

Is the appeals process working well?

There was no consensus regarding how well the appeals process is working. While some participants stated that the process was working well, others stated their displeasure with or ambivalence about the process.

Participants satisfied with the process were, in the main, clients and staff. They highlighted telephone appeals as an important innovation and described the appeal process as an important accountability measure. Participants dissatisfied with the process tended to be clients or advocacy groups. They criticized the process as being too long, difficult to access, not well publicized, bureaucratic, inflexible, inconsistent, ineffective, insensitive to clients' needs, impersonal, intimidating, uncomfortable, not transparent (i.e., unavailability of statistics about appeal success rates) and 'subject to political interference.'

ARE THERE ADDITIONAL WAYS THAT WE CAN ENSURE A FAIR AND EFFICIENT APPEALS PROCESS?

Suggested ways to improve the appeals process include:

Improving access to information: Provide easily accessible, plain-language information about appeals in appropriate formats; provide easier access to client files during the appeals process; and clarify the appeals procedure for the special assistance program.

Changing the composition of the Appeal Board: Ensure that one or more members of the Appeal Board are former or current recipients of Social Assistance; ensure that members of the Appeal Board have diverse backgrounds and experiences; or elect Appeal Board members.

Providing representation: Provide an independent advocate or impartial worker to assist people through the process; or have an advocacy committee consisting of volunteers from the community to assist the appellant.

> *The appeals process will never work well until clients are fully informed and empowered to use it properly. Literacy is an issue. If clients are not comfortable with an appeal process, they must be encouraged to use an advocate.*
>
> *Brief*

Improving communications: Participants stated that communications with clients during the appeals process should be improved, e.g., reassure people that appealing will not adversely affect their access to benefits, programs or services; promote the appeals process to people receiving Social Assistance; and advise prospective appellants whether a decision is based on legislation or policy.

Changing the appeals process: Structure hearings to be non-intimidating; ensure that people making decisions are not departmental staff; abolish the level of speaking to a Supervisor; abolish the Service Review Committee; combine the Appeals Board and Service Review Committee; have a regional appeals committee; implement an additional level of appeal after the Appeal Board - one that is less costly and more accessible than the courts; make the appeal process quicker and less formal; expedite the appeals process in

emergency cases; provide a means of progressing directly to the Appeal Board in cases that are obviously destined to go there; have a shorter time-frame for appeals to be heard; and provide the option of a speedy face-to-face appeal.

Supporting client dignity: Ensure that all participants respect the appellant's dignity.

Improving investigations: Completely investigate all matters subject to appeal, and do home visits where necessary.

Changing staff procedures: Have one worker in each office be responsible for all appeal letters/ hearings, or provide staff with legal representation if the appellant has a lawyer.

Improving access to appeal hearings for clients: Hold appeal hearings at a convenient, easily accessible location for people receiving Social Assistance, and provide transportation.

Other Issues and Areas for Improvement

There were many other issues and areas for improvement identified during the consultation process, as participants spoke candidly about what needs to be changed. Suggested new initiatives and areas for improvement include:

Medical Benefits

- Providing universal drug card coverage to all whose income falls below a certain level.
- Continuing the extended drug card program past six months for persons leaving Social Assistance for employment.
- Purchasing health insurance policies for people receiving Social Assistance, instead of the current drug card plan.
- Providing six month drug cards instead of monthly drug cards or a permanent drug card for people with on-going, chronic needs or disabilities.
- Considering actual rather than set mortgage rates when assessing eligibility for a drug card.
- Extending the drug card coverage to include a greater range of medications, including over-the-counter medications, arthritis drugs and medications to help quit smoking, and more dental work, e.g., fillings and cosmetic work.
- Providing drug cards to post-secondary students and people with serious medical conditions if they do not have a drug plan.
- Providing more medical transportation, especially within districts.
- Transferring all health related issues to Health and Community Services.

> *Termination of drug card benefits after six months is a major deterrent for people with longstanding monthly drug costs. For example, some consumers of mental health services have high monthly drug expenditures and, so, without on-going drug coverage, their ability to access full-time long-term employment is severely constrained.*
>
> *Brief*

Childcare

- Increasing childcare rates to more accurately reflect the cost of childcare.
- Supporting initiatives to provide daycare in communities where it is lacking.

> *You do look for work, but I'm here, in this area, with a house and a 5-year-old son. I need money to pay a babysitter and my bills. I need money to break even because I had to hire a babysitter.*
>
> *Client Focus Group*

Benefits

- Increasing rates.
- Providing clothing allowances for people receiving Social Assistance.
- Factoring the cost of working into basic rates, e.g., costs of resumes, travel, clothing, and a telephone.
- Providing furniture to people receiving Social Assistance.
- Providing subsidies to reflect the costs associated with school age children, including money for lunches, clothes, extra-curricular activities, and school supplies.
- Improving child benefits, e.g., increasing the threshold for the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Tax Benefit.
- Increasing the amount given for special diets, and extending what is covered.
- Increasing the fuel allowance to reflect the actual cost of fuel.

Earning Exemptions

- Incorporating a gradual scale system for earnings exemptions by allowing people to keep a percentage of their earnings over a certain amount.
- Replacing earnings exemptions with an income ceiling cut-off that takes into account the cost of working and is adequate for people's basic needs.
- Implementing earnings exemptions for Human Resources Development Canada training allowances, Job Creation Program earnings, and Youth Service Canada Program bonuses.
- Increasing the exempt amounts.
- Implementing one exemption rate for all clients.

> *There is no incentive for a single person to go to work. If the person earned $900.00 a month: only $100.00 a month would be gained. Who wants to work full time for a $100.00? The solution would be to let the person qualify for welfare until 30% in excess of welfare is reached.*
>
> *Letter*

Working with Employers

- Working with employers to produce an updated and accurate database of skills required in the future.
- Forwarding resumes to employers, with client consent.
- Ensuring that employers match government wage subsidies.

More Diverse Employment and Career Supports

- Providing English as a Second Language courses, 'soft skills' training (how to get along in a work environment, how to speak in groups), and more extensive pre-employment programming.
- Funding Adult Basic Education, Level 1.
- Increasing training and educational opportunities, including funding for the Linkages program so that more youth can be reached.
- Training people to become journeypersons' helpers.
- Changing current policies that only allow funding of up to 12 weeks of training for most clients and which require clients to take out student loans for training in excess of 12 weeks.
- Providing job finding clubs for youth.
- Offering more assistance for work tools and equipment.
- Supporting volunteer work.
- Focusing on job creation rather than 'make-work'.
- Supporting self-employment by providing wide-ranging supports for clients who are, or who wish to become, self-employed.
- Monthly stipends for Social Assistance recipients involved in employment-related activities.
- Providing mobility assistance attached to a case managed plan.

Supports for Post-Secondary Education

- Providing assistance with application fees.
- Eliminating the 'claw-back' of the shelter component of student loans.
- Paying tuition.
- Not considering scholarships as income.

Transitional Measures

- Gradually decreasing work supports and incentives instead of suddenly terminating them as people move into the work force.
- Continuing Income Support for the first 30 days a client is employed.

Overpayments/Underpayments

- Changing policies and legislation regarding overpayments to have the same time period considered when setting up both underpayments and overpayments.
- Increasing the rate of recovery for overpayments according to the frequency a person incurs overpayments or the reason for the overpayment.
- Not creating overpayments in exceptional circumstances, e.g., victims of violence.

Earlier Interventions

- Giving 'reality checks' for youth in junior high and high school to show what they would be entitled to receive from Income Support.
- Putting more emphasis on the Individual Support Services Plan process.
- Intervening more quickly to assist the unemployed after E.I. benefits are terminated.

> *HRE staff should do a "reality check" for youth in school to show them what they will be entitled to on Income Support and then bring them through career planning options.*
>
> *Staff Focus Group*

Eligibility

- Including special benefits when assessing eligibility.
- Implementing eligibility assessments that are not based on individual needs but, rather, assess households.
- Assessing income only for the past 30 days instead of 60 days when determining eligibility.
- Increasing the amount of liquid assets (cash or money in the bank) that is allowed to be kept.
- Increasing the amount of income tax rebate that is allowed to be kept, or not considering rebates when assessing eligibility for Income Support.

- Implementing a less complex method of assessing business income that does not require the current huge amount of paperwork.
- Not considering honorariums for volunteer and workplace positions as income.
- Considering improvements to the eligibility rules so that people who take short-term jobs will not be penalized by 4-10 week waiting periods if they re-apply for Social Assistance.
- Implementing simpler eligibility rules.

Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement

- Increasing the amount paid and extending eligibility for children up to the age of five, instead of to age one.
- Increasing the threshold so that it is available to more people.
- Providing milk coupons instead of having people buy milk.

Incentives for Educational Attainment

- Providing a 'stay-in-school allowance' for youth in high school.
- Providing the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit or National Child Benefit to youths over 18 but still in high school.
- Allowing parents to 'shelter' a percentage of their earnings in a Registered Education Savings Plan that would not affect eligibility for Social Assistance.

Housing Initiatives

- Providing shelter rates that enable people to have adequate and safe housing and funding for regular preventative home maintenance.
- Providing funding for apartments for adults without dependents, not just to people with children.
- Not decreasing assistance if people are hospitalized for more than 30 days, and providing assistance so that they can store and move their personal belongings if necessary, and pay their bills.
- Working with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to ensure that rental rates for clients do not increase when they go to work, perhaps through a period of overlap where the lower rental rate continues for a set period of time.

> *We can't afford to get a decent apartment to live in because the rents are too high. Because we don't have enough money. I am forced to live in a basement that's not big enough to turn around in.*
>
> *Letter*

- Providing rent subsidies.
- Covering damage deposits, without affecting Social Assistance cheques.

Child Support

- Discontinuing the claw-back of child support.
- Discontinuing requirements for clients to pursue child support.

Rural Issues

- Addressing the lack of employment, educational and training opportunities, difficulties accessing work supports such as childcare, and greater costs for medical and emergency Social Assistance often found in rural areas.

Transportation Supports

- Providing bus passes more frequently.
- Implementing greater flexibility to provide transportation for job interviews or to go to work.

Assistance for New Canadians

- Providing assistance with job placements, retraining, exam fees, language training and re-certification costs.

Another key issue that should be addressed includes the retraining and acceptance of new Canadians into medical and other professions. In a province which has vacancies to be filled, the benefit of helping fund language training and re-certification programs would produce positive results for all.

Brief

Supports for Aboriginal Persons

- Focusing on the current and future labour market demands of aboriginal groups.
- Addressing aboriginal persons' employability and access to services.
- Providing Level 1 Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language courses.
- Providing more information, notices and application forms in aboriginal languages.

Other Suggestions

- Providing Supported Employment for Single Parents province-wide.
- Implementing more inclusive policies e.g., 'Services should be available to everyone and not just to groups such as single parents'.
- Ensuring that mail-in applications do not increase waiting time.
- Increasing accountability, e.g., 'single able-bodied people should have to provide proof that they are seeking work'.
- Addressing personal social needs as part of a case managed action plan.
- Ensuring that in-depth assessments are completed on all new and reopened cases, with follow-up such as employment and career counseling.
- Providing advocates to assist clients who have conflicts with staff.
- Seeking client feedback to ensure that people are being well-served, e.g., periodic consultations.

Suggestions about Other Departments and Governments

According to participants, other departments and governments should be:

- Encouraging employers to provide adequate health benefits for employees.
- Providing more co-operative education, internship, job shadowing, and young graduate programs.
- Providing grants instead of student loans to people wishing to further their education, or offering student loan repayment assistance - 'Needs based grants were a step, but something more needs to be done for extremely low income people'.
- Bringing career fairs to high schools instead of holding them in post-secondary institutions.
- Offering career planning in elementary, junior high and high schools.
- Raising the minimum wage.
- Addressing the gaps in the Canada Child Tax Benefit, National Child Benefit, and Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit that may cause Income Support recipients to suffer in years following a year of good income.
- Expanding initiatives to improve nutrition, such as breakfast programs and educational campaigns.
- Implementing rent control.
- Addressing out-migration.

Appendix A - Schedule of Consultations

Client Groups (7)		
Avalon	March 28	St. John's
Avalon	April 18	Harbour Grace
Central	March 6	Twillingate
Western	April 2	St. Anthony
Labrador	April 22	Happy Valley-Goose Bay
Labrador	April 24	Nain
Labrador	April 30	Wabush/Labrador City
Youth(3)		
Central	March 12	Grand Falls-Windsor
Avalon	March 27	Carbonear
Members of Youth Advisory Council	May 13	Youth Services and Post-Secondary Education
Community (10)		
Avalon (CABS)	April 23	St. John's
Avalon	April 9	St. John's
Avalon	April 17	Bay Roberts
Central	March 20	Gander
Central	April 3	Clarenville
Western	April 26	Corner Brook
Labrador	April 23	Happy Valley-Goose Bay
Labrador	April 23	Happy Valley-Goose Bay
Labrador	April 24	Nain
Labrador	April 29	Wabush/Labrador City
Strategic Social Plan (6)		
Avalon	March 26	St. Bride's
Avalon/Northeast Avalon	April 3	St. John's
Central/Eastern	March 27	Clarenville
Central	March 14	Grand Falls-Windsor
Western/Cormack-Grenfell	April 10	Corner Brook
Labrador	May 14	Nain
Staff Sessions (4)		
Avalon	April 11	Mount Pearl
Central	April 10	Gander
Western	March 22	Corner Brook
Labrador	March 6	Happy Valley-Goose Bay
Government Departments	May 7	St. John's (Intergovernmental)

17 HRE district office and 2 provincial office focus groups were also held.

Appendix B - Briefs, Presentations, and Other Community Group Submissions

- AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador
- Association for New Canadians
- Benoit's Cove Indian Band Council
- Burin Peninsula Community Enrichment Committee
- Capital Coast Development Alliance
- Coalition of Persons with Disabilities
- Community Health Awareness Network - Newfoundland and Labrador (CHANNAL) Metro Advisory Steering Committee and CHANNAL Members
- Community Health Awareness Network - Newfoundland and Labrador (CHANNAL) - Provincial Coordinator (in consultation with Mental Health Consumers in Newfoundland and Labrador)
- Daybreak Parent Child Centre
- Dieticians of Newfoundland and Labrador
- FINALY (Futures in Newfoundland and Labrador's Youth)
- Health and Community Services - Eastern Board
- Independent Living Resource Centre
- Mental Health Program - Waterford Hospital
- Mercy Residence Advocacy Committee
- Mill Lane Enterprises and Evergeen Recycling
- Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour
- Newfoundland and Labrador Health Boards Association
- Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation
- Refugee Immigration Advisory Council
- Schizophrenia Society of Newfoundland and Labrador
- Social Action Group
- Status of Women - Bay St. George
- Western Health Care Corporation
- Women's Centre - St. John's

Appendix C - Community Focus Group Participants by Region

Avalon Region

St. John's	AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador
	Brother T.I. Murphy Learning Resource Centre
	Canadian Mental Health Association
	Canadian Federation of Students
	Capital Coast Development Alliance
	Community Health Awareness Network - Newfoundland and Labrador (CHANNAL)
	College of the North Atlantic
	Correctional Services Canada
	Epilepsy Newfoundland and Labrador
	Food Security Network
	Health & Community Services, St. John's Region
	Health Care Corporation of St. John's
	Newfoundland and Labrador Health Boards Association
	Newfoundland and Labrador Advisory Council on the Status of Women
	Provincial Association Against Family Violence
	St. John's Status of Women
	Strategic Social Plan
	Victim Services, Department of Justice
	Women Interested in Successful Employment (WISE)
	Women's Centre
Carbonear/ Bay Roberts	Genesis Employment Corporation
	Health & Community Services - Eastern
	Human Resources Development Canada, Harbour Grace
	Newfoundland and Labrador Food Security Network, Holyrood
	Strategic Social Plan - Avalon Region
	Trinity-Conception Family Resource Centre
	Trinity-Conception Employment Corporation
Clarenville	Burin Peninsula Community Enrichment Committee
	Burin-Marystown Training and Employment
	Eastern Health & Community Services Board, Clarenville Area
	Eastern Health & Community Services Board, Burin Bay Area
	Grace Sparkes House
	Human Resources Development Canada

Clarenville (cont.)	Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, Marystown
	Random North Development Association
	Three (L) Training and Employment
	Vista Family Resource Centre, Bonavista
Gander	Central-Eastern Literacy Outreach Office
	College of the North Atlantic, Gander Campus
	Department of Health & Community Services
	Exploits Community Employment Corporation
	Food Security Network - Health & Community Services Central
	Gambo & Area Employment Corporation
	Gander Women's Centre
	Human Resources Development Canada (LMDA)
	Human Resources Development Canada
	Human Resources Development Canada - Employment Assistance Services
	Lewisporte/Gander School Board
	Mi'Kmaq Resources & Development
	Mental Health Services, Health & Community Services Central
	Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation
	Women Interested in Successful Employment (WISE)
	Your Strength is Our Strength Club
Corner Brook	Benoit's Cove Indian Band Council
	Canadian Paraplegic Association
	Consumer Health Awareness Network - Newfoundland and Labrador (CHANNAL)
	Gateway Women's Centre
	Health and Community Services - Western
	Human Resources Development Canada
	Humber Valley Community Employment Corporation
	Marine Mountain (Zone 10) Corporation
	Mi'Kmaq Resources and Development
	Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living
	Newfoundland Native Women
	Transition House
	Western Health Care Corporation
	Women's Centre

Labrador Region

Nain	Child, Youth & Family Services
	Labrador Inuit Health Commission
	Nain Women's Action Group
Wabush	Child, Youth & Family Services
	Family Crisis Shelter
	Human Resources Development Canada
	Hyron Regional Economic Development Board
	Labrador West Status of Women Council
	Labrador West Association for Community Living
Happy Valley-Goose Bay	Canadian Paraplegic Association
	Child, Youth & Family Services, Health Labrador Corporation
	College of the North Atlantic
	Economic Development Board - Central Labrador
	Health Labrador Corporation
	Human Resources Development Canada - LMDA
	Human Resources Development Canada
	Labrador Friendship Centre
	Lake Melville Community Employment
	Libra House
	Labrador Literacy Information and Action Network (LLIAN)
	Mokami Status of Women Council
	Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation
	Perrault Place Community Centre (PPAC-PPTA)
Happy Valley-Goose Bay (aboriginal)	Aboriginal Family Centre
	Innu Nation
	Labrador Inuit Health Commission
	Shakastueu Pishum Family Resource Centre
	Sheshatshiu Band Council
	Sheshatshiu Innu Health Commission

Appendix D - Focus Group Questions

Themes

1. Making the move from Social Assistance to work
2. Youth
3. Rights and responsibilities
4. The role of the family
5. Flexible Social Assistance
6. Program delivery
7. Other issues

1. Making the Move from Social Assistance to Work

It's important to recognize that some people will need Social Assistance for long periods of time. Other people will need help for shorter periods. Still others may need help finding and keeping work.

Question: How can the Department better assist people to prepare for, find and keep work?

Employment and career planning helps people decide what kind of work they want to do. It also helps identify the kind of training and employment supports they need to achieve their goals. An employment and career plan considers a person's employment barriers. It also considers their strengths. Right now, clients choose whether they want to participate in employment and career planning.

Question: Should those who are able to work have to participate in employment and career planning? Or should it be a client's choice? WHY?

2. Youth

Youth receiving Social Assistance sometimes have a hard time finding and keeping work. Almost 45% of new entrants to the Social Assistance program in 2001 were aged 18-29. It is important to help youth gain the job skills, training, and education that lead to employment. Youth may need preparation to help them find work. Employment and career counseling, academic upgrading and training courses are examples of active measures that can help people prepare for the labour force.

Question: How can the Department best help youth join the labour force?

Question: Employment and career supports are things like wage subsidies, training, employment counseling, employment programs, and work supports (special clothing, transportation, etc.) that can help someone as they prepare for, find and keep work. Should youth receiving Social Assistance be a priority to receive employment and career supports?

Question: Should youth be required to participate in employment and career supports like employment and career counseling, academic upgrading and training courses, that can help them better prepare for, find and keep work? Or, should they choose whether to participate? WHY?

3. Rights and Responsibilities

Clients have rights and responsibilities. For example, they have the right to see their files, and must provide accurate information when they apply for Social Assistance. The Department has a responsibility to provide stable and dignified Social Assistance, and to protect clients' personal information contained in files, in accordance with provincial information relating to access to information and protection of privacy. It must also ensure that its services go only to those in need.

Question: What are the Department's responsibilities to clients?

Question: What client rights do you think the Department should incorporate into its policies and legislation? Client responsibilities?

4. The Role of the Family

It is generally recognized that families have a responsibility to support their children. What is not as clear is the age at which this responsibility ends. Right now, the Department considers parents' income when determining if a single, employable person under age 21, living with relatives, is eligible for Social Assistance.

Question: Do you think that 21 is the right age to stop considering the income of a person's parent(s)?

Question: If no, at what age should the Department stop considering the income of the person's parents?

Question: Are there situations, regardless of age, where the Department should not consider parents' income?

5. Flexible Social Assistance

Clients have told the Department that they are frustrated by the fact that they can receive Social Assistance for long periods, but when they try to get financial support to move off Social Assistance, they can't get it.

Right now, Social Assistance money is used to pay for basic necessities. However, the Department has had success with programs that use Social Assistance money flexibly to help people get work. For example, the NewfoundJobs program uses Social Assistance funds to help people find and keep work.

Here are two examples of ways the Department could use Social Assistance more flexibly.

Example 1

Mary lives in a small town. She receives Social Assistance. She has a job offer in a nearby town, but no money to move there. Mary has asked for her next two months of Social Assistance up-front to help her move. In return, Mary would agree not to apply for Social Assistance for two months.

Example 2

John has not worked for a few years. He wants to go back in the workforce, but he does not have much experience. If he requests, money from Social Assistance could help support a job placement. He would get experience that would result in a job.

Question: Should the Social Assistance Program be modified to allow the Department to be more flexible in helping clients? WHY?

6. Program Delivery

We are here today to get your feedback on the directions new legislation should take. However, we're also interested in your feedback on how the Department can improve its service to you. The Department's goal is to deliver Social Assistance in a respectful, least intrusive manner. This support should be delivered quickly and fairly, without a lot of red tape and unnecessary paperwork. As well, in recent years, the Income Support and Employment and Career Services programs have been redesigned to encourage and support people as they prepare for, find,and keep work.

Question: Is the Department going in the right direction?

7. Other Issues